SILENCE SPEAKS VOLUMES
CSEA FROM A GAY PERSPECTIVE

I have been a member of the Civil Service Employee Association (CSEA) for fifteen years; actually I have been a member eleven years. The first four years I mistakenly thought I was a Union member as dues were regularly taken from my paycheck. I had never been told I needed to sign a card to belong to the union. In fact for four years no one attempted to explain in any way the structure or nature of CSEA or to get me invested in the operation of the unit. This information vacuum prompted me in 2002 to inquire about the requirements to become a steward. At the time Monroe Community College (MCC) was under the Monroe County contract. Jim Volpone was Unit President of Unit 7400. I initially approached our section President who did not have the steward information to give me and said he would get back to me, which never happened despite multiple requests. When I asked for the third time, his response was "whatever". Fortunately for Monroe Community College (MCC), Pat Wolff decided to run successfully for section President and with her guidance I soon became a Steward for MCC. By 2004 the pinch of benefit inequity for same sex couples was hitting me personally. I asked Pat if we could negotiate for domestic partner benefits for Monroe Community College. Pat agreed that this was clearly a workers rights issue and was a supporter from the very beginning. She asked that I do some research and present it to her. I created a binder which included my personal testimony (attached [1]), business, academic and union policies and statistics as well as other pertinent information about domestic partner benefits. Pat took this research to her executive board as well as the legal counsel and asked if she could share it with the Faculty Association. The Faculty Association used my research and successfully negotiated for domestic partner benefits in their contract which was ratified before ours.

So Amazing and so discouraging

Brave!

During this period, the MCC CSEA section led by the Executive Board was in the process of fragmenting from the County CSEA Unit. This was voted on and passed overwhelmingly. While under the Monroe County unit MCC CSEA members always seemed out of the loop and felt poorly represented in negotiations. We were paid by the college, not by Monroe County, our working conditions were different and there was

little overlap of our issues with the unit CSEA member issues, so fragmenting was a logical step.

Now we were faced with negotiating an entire contract with the college. This was accomplished over a 4 -5 month period and the final contract presented for ratification included domestic partner benefits. The day the contract was ratified is one that I will never forget. I was in the CSEA office when the 290 votes were counted and the contract passed overwhelmingly! Unexpectedly I started crying – it was the first time that I truly felt that I was part of MCC, included and equally valued as an employee and co-worker. Plus I now knew that I could make a difference. And How!

Despite enjoying our success, I realized that the majority of Monroe County employees were still without domestic partner benefits and the inequity bothered me. I became an 'accidental activist' as I started to address the unfairness. Anne, my partner at the time (wife now) and I started speaking at the Monroe County legislature on a regular basis. We had no clue what we were doing, how government worked or how to lobby. We received a call from County Legislator Harry Bronson who asked if we knew Tom Privitere, Public Employees Federation (PEF) organizer – and this was the beginning of our political, social justice and community service involvement. We met with President of the Legislature, Wayne Zyra, Majority Leader Bill Smith and Legislator Doug Dobson (all Republicans) to discuss the need for domestic partner benefits and ask them to approve a resolution (attached [2]). They were receptive, asked the right questions and clearly indicated they understood that it was a workers rights issue. They all had experience with previous employers who offered these benefits. In fact, Mr. Zyra was on the MCC Board of Directors that approved domestic partner benefits for the college unions. They stated that they were taking the matter up with the County Executive, Maggie Brooks. It took a long time before we realized that party politics trumped their individual sincerity. To this day Monroe County employees do not have domestic partner benefits and Anne and I continue to speak monthly at the legislature reminding them "to do the right thing".

Through this process it was difficult for us to get the CSEA unit, most impacted, on board – we finally managed to get a letter from President Jim Volpone supporting this effort. Lack of understanding of the internal politics and the way things worked caused

some missteps, but I learned fast. I realized that to get what I wanted I had to cultivate relationships with the significant players not simply ask for what was right... First I had to apologize to Jim as I had included the President of the Region in an e-mail that I sent to him concerning the topic. Jim stated to me clearly that "she is not my boss". He also said he understood the issues and did not want "to be lectured to" – not the best of exchanges with someone who was in the position of power to actually make a difference to his members. This exchange also demonstrated the acrimonious relationships within CSEA which I would have to navigate. John Vasko, President of the Federation of Social Workers heard us speak at the County Legislature and became our unofficial mentor in this process (bless his heart).

During this time Pat Martinez at Monroe Community College filed a lawsuit to have her marriage in Canada recognized by her employer Monroe County. From the year 2005 on the civil rights issue of equal marriage for same sex couples has been gaining steady momentum in New York State and around the nation. Ultimately, gays and lesbians can not be regarded as fully equal citizens until our relationships are protected by marriage. To quote Massachusetts Supreme Court Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall in Goodridge vs. Department of Health "*Civil marriage is at once a deeply personal commitment to another human being and a highly public celebration of the ideals of mutuality, companionship, intimacy, fidelity, and family.... Because it fulfils yearnings for security, safe haven, and connection that express our common humanity, civil marriage is an esteemed institution and the decision whether and whom to marry is among life's momentous acts of self-definition.*"

Over time there has been a growing self awareness within our selves and the larger gay community of the degree to which gays have been marginalized by our society. Full inclusion and equality is being demanded not hoped for. In some ways domestic partner benefits are only a means to get from third class to second class status. Unlike married spouses, those who have domestic partner benefits, whether straight or gay, are heavily taxed on the health insurance benefits received. When I first placed Anne on my health insurance my net pay decreased $110.00 per pay period due to the increased taxes. It surprised me and everyone else. The tax consequences were not known by CSEA or MCC administration during contract negotiations and present an

unequal burden and benefit inequity. However, domestic partner benefits at least allow for bereavement, sick leave, and tuition reimbursement that would not otherwise be there – so it is an incremental step and something that CSEA needs to continue to include in their contract negotiations.

In 2006 the Rochester & Genesee Valley Labor Federation approved a resolution in support of Marriage Equality (attached[3]). This is one of the best resolutions I have read on why labor needs to support equal marriage for same sex couples. Marriage is a workplace issue when so many benefits get triggered by marital status. Also, in 2007 a coalition of Unions representing over 850,000 New York State workers (attached [4]) urged the New York State Assembly to pass the Marriage Equality Bill, which the Assembly did. CSEA was noticeably lacking in their support. In fact, in my research for domestic partner benefits, the only reference in regards to CSEA and domestic partner benefits was with the State contract. Essentially there were no examples from municipal or local levels which indicated negligible broad support by CSEA. If you search the CSEA website (http://www.csealocal1000.org/) and type in 'gay' you will only receive 1 hit. On the other hand when you search 'gay' within www.nysut.org, the New York State Union of Teachers site and you will receive 45 hits. It appears as if CSEA goes out of their way to exclude the gay and lesbian community. However I am hopeful that this will diminish with increased awareness and education of union members. In my opinion CSEA appears uncomfortable with the concept of board inclusion and representative leadership involving any perceived minority but are especially non supportive of their gay and lesbian members. Their silence, lack of advocacy, inclusion and support speaks volumes to gay and lesbian CSEA members. It creates a fear of 'coming out' for gay CSEA members. It is a catch 22 as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people will not be visible in a perceived unsafe environment and the subsequent lack of visibility gives the organization permission to ignore them: "no gays have asked for anything."

As a long time CSEA member I was and continue to be disheartened with the general lack of support from the leadership of my union, particularly State level CSEA Inc. This is one of the reasons that a group of us created the AFL-CIO minority constituency group "Pride at Work" to advocate for LGBT worker concerns.

Collectively we felt that we would not be heard unless we organized. In October 2007 members and supporters from various Unions; NYSUT, Public Employees Federation, CSEA, Federation of Social Workers and SEIU, as well as non-union members, voted to create the Rochester Finger Lakes Chapter of Pride at Work and voted me in as their President. & natural leader!

In November 2007 we created a press release (attached[5]) announcing our new chapter. I personally sent the press release to CSEA Region 6 and asked that they include this information on their webpage and forward the information to the CSEA The Workforce newsletter. I never received a response, and to this day I have never read the word 'gay' or 'lesbian' in any Workforce issue despite multiple newsworthy submissions. During this time I was appointed a delegate to the Rochester Labor Council. As mentioned previously they had already endorsed marriage equality. The Labor Council under President Jim Bertolone immediately placed Pride at Work on their agenda on a monthly basis. The support for Pride at Work has been wonderful with the exception of CSEA. To illustrate this point I will use the support of the Federation of Social Workers (FSW) under John Vasko President as a concrete example of what an organization can do:

- Within 2 months they became organizational members
- FSW allocated 5 slots for their members to join Pride at Work
- FSW provided space and hospitality for our meetings (including lots of pizza…)
- John and others provided mentoring on the dynamics of labor within the Rochester community and New York State
- The FSW Executive Board approved the first printing of 2000 brochures for Pride at Work
- They provided a mailing address
- FSW purchased a table for our 1st annual "True Colors" Award dinner
- They let us know of opportunities for exposure and helped spread the word

Fantastic solidarity

Wow!

All of the above added up to credibility for our chapter from the beginning and have played a huge part in our growth this year.

In February 2008 the state appellate court ruled that Monroe Community College must recognize same sex marriage in an action now known as the "Martinez decision". The plaintiff, Patricia Martinez is a CSEA member. This made national and statewide news. The Clarion (attached) which is a monthly newsletter published by CUNY – American Federation of Teachers included an article with the headline "CSEA member wins on marriage equality". Despite my efforts to get CSEA to publicize this milestone in New York State civil rights history they chose to ignore it. I had requested coverage of the Martinez decision in the CSEA publication The Workforce and was told they would do an article in the following e-mail exchange between me and CSEA Executive Vice President Mary Sullivan between April 2008 and June of 2008. The exchanges also reveal a lack of understanding of the dynamics of 'closeting' in the LGBT community and a willingness to assume that invisibility of LGBT workers means non-existence and/or that LGBT workers feel they have no equity issues to be addressed. Clearly the exchanges do not reflect enthusiastic mentoring by CSEA leadership in how to advance LGBT visibility and worker issues:

It's both sad & exasperating you've had to carry CSEA - your own union is indepted to you.

To Mary:

I hope you don't mind me e-mailing you directly. My name is Bess Watts and I am the President of the Rochester Finger Lakes Chapter of Pride at Work here in Rochester.

I am wondering if you would be willing to help me navigate the waters of CSEA on how best to raise awareness for our members about gay and lesbian issues in the workplace. I heard from Ove Overmyer that you may be speaking at Equality and Justice Day in Albany, if that is the case, perhaps we could meet for a little while on April 29th as I will be there lobbying.

In my other roles, I am Vice President #3 of Local 828, Unit 7402 here at Monroe Community College and I am also a delegate for the Rochester Labor Council. I attend most of the regional meetings and have received verbal support from Flo Tripi as well as Bernie Giambra, yet I fear that gay and lesbian issues are seen as political rather than a workplace issue where it squarely belongs.

Also, is there any possibility that we could get an article in the Workforce newspaper about the Pat Martinez decision? If you go to the following link, the Clarion of CUNY did a wonderful story where I was quoted and CSEA is clearly mentioned on page 5:

http://www.psc-cuny.org/Clarion/ClarionMarch2008.pdf

I would appreciate any advice, response or direction you can give me.

Sincerely and in solidarity,

Bess Watts
President, Rochester Finger Lakes Pride At Work

From: Mary E Sullivan [mailto:mary.sullivan@cseainc.org]
Sent: Friday, April 11, 2008 2:24 PM
To: Watts, Bess (ETS: Library)
Subject: RE: Introduction - Pride At Work

Bess,

Thank you for writing and including the article about Pat Martinez decision. I have spoken with our Director of Communications and he will be including an article in the June edition of The Workforce.
I won't be speaking at the lobby day on 4/29 so I'm unable to talk with you then. I would, however, be interested in hearing your suggestions as to how you think awareness of the Pride at Work agenda could be raised among CSEA's Locals & Units and what issues we might need to address.
Frankly, not a lot of our gay & lesbian members have approached the union to support a particular issue or issues. As the Executive Vice President of the Capital District Area Labor Federation, I can tell you that our Board was very supportive of a Pride at Work chapter here. However, the members of the gay & lesbian community who initially agreed to help organize the group apparently lost interest. As a result, you are ahead of us in Rochester.
The Union itself has long supported domestic partner benefits and, in fact, negotiated health care benefits for our state employee members in the early 80's. This was due in large measure to several very vocal members who made it clear that they wanted their union to support inclusion of domestic partner benefits in their contract.
In my experience as a CSEA officer, the gay & lesbian CSEA members have not articulated their desire for CSEA's support on any particular issues since that time, including the issue of marriage equality. Requests for support for that issue have come from outside groups, such as the Empire State Pride Agenda, even though CSEA delegates to the 2004 AFSCME Convention voted to adopt a resolution in support of marriage equality.
All of that aside, I look forward to hearing your suggestions.

Good grief

People tend not to talk if no one is listening . . . ?

Mary E Sullivan
CSEA Executive Vice President
mary.sullivan@cseainc.org

Hi Mary,

Thank you for your response, you have given me much to think about. I would like to submit a resolution for Marriage Equality for the CSEA's convention in September, where can I find the process on how to do that?

I understand that CSEA has a lot on their plate and often times GLBT issues can go by the wayside. I know there are a lot of CSEA GLBT members out there, why they do not speak out is something I hope Pride at Work can help with. In the meantime, I will keep chipping away and continue to try and raise awareness on this very important workplace issue.

Hopefully, we can meet sometimes and talk as my writing ability leaves much to be desired! Any advice on submitting a resolution would be appreciated.

Thanks again,

Bess

Subject: RE: Introduction - Pride At Work

Bess,

Resolutions for the 2008 Annual Delegates Meeting must be submitted by May 15th. However, resolutions can only be submitted by delegates to the convention.
I would be happy to talk with you some time. Your ability to communicate in writing is fine though.

Mary E Sullivan

Mary,

Can you direct me to the policy and procedure for submitting a resolution? I find that I am getting mixed messages, Flo stated that I need to fill out the forms that she sent Bernie and to send those forms directly to Albany, and Bernie does not have the forms readily available. Now I'm told that delegates need to introduce the resolutions, and I'm not sure of the process for that to happen, would that be Local or Regional delegates? I don't think it is intentional, but it is extremely difficult to get the correct information to submit a simple resolution. There must be some place where I can find the information in writing; could you please direct me to this source of information?

Thank you so much for any help you can provide.

In solidarity,

Bess

Bess,

The process for submitting resolutions was described in an article on page 17 of the April edition of the CSEA newspaper, The Workforce. Resolutions can only be submitted by delegates to the CSEA Statewide Annual Delegates Meeting on forms that are available at the Region office or at CSEA Headquarters. Resolutions must be submitted on the appropriate form to the Statewide Secretary at CSEA Headquarters by May 15th. Faxed copies are not acceptable.
Local officers, by virtue of their positions, serve as the delegates to the Annual Meeting. Regions do not have delegates.
I hope that this information is useful to you. CSEA is a very complex organization and sometimes there is no "simple" answer to a question.

Mary E Sullivan

Thank you Mary, I'm beginning to understand the process, and your message explained a great deal. Is the appropriate form in the CSEA newspaper or is there a PDF file at the State website that I can download? Or do I have to get it from a local officer? Unfortunately, I do not have access to the Workforce newspaper as my partner recycled it last week.

Thank you and I will not bother you for at least two months! If you are ever in the Rochester area I will treat you to dinner.

Bess

I will sent you a form and a copy of the article. Just remember that you are not a delegate and someone who is would have to agree to file your proposed resolution. So that you are aware of what happens next, after the resolutions are filed, they are submitted to the Resolutions Committee for consideration. This Committee reviews them, discusses them and then presents the resolutions to the delegates with the Committee's recommendation to either adopt or not adopt each resolution.
Resolutions that are proposed are also required to be published in The Workforce before the Annual Delegates Meeting so that the members are aware of what resolutions are being considered.

I hope that this information is helpful to you.

Now that I understand the entire process, it makes sense. Thank you so much for your time and effort in this matter. If you are mailing the forms, my home address is:

Bess Watts
3 Rossmore Street
Rochester NY 14606

Have a great evening.

Bess

You are steadfast & possess incredible patience.

From Watts, Bess (ETS: Library) <bwatts@monroecc.edu>
Sent Thu 6/5/2008 11:47 AM
To Mary E Sullivan <mary.sullivan@cseainc.org>
Subject It's been over 2 weeks...

Mary,

I'm bothering you again. Will you be coming to the Statewide training this weekend in Niagara Falls?

I hope that you received my message that I will be waiting until next year to submit the marriage equality resolution, thank YOU so much for your help. In the meantime I will be working with my local to learn the correct and proper process. On another matter, I was disappointed that there was no mention of the Martinez decision in the June Workforce newspaper I received at home. I will continue to be a 'gentle bulldog' on this issue. It is important for the rank and file gay members to see and read that they are included in CSEA; so far we are falling behind in this area. In addition, are there going to be workshops educating stewards, and officers about the impact of the Paterson directive that agencies treat same sex couples married outside of New York the same as opposite sex couples? Would that be a role for CSEA, especially if our members are refused benefits? As President of Pride at Work here in Rochester I have received numerous questions about the impact this will have on those workplaces that do not offer domestic partner benefits, particularly here in Monroe County. I know of at least 2 CSEA couples that will be going to California this summer to get married.

I really don't expect you to know all the answers to my questions. I'm hoping you don't mind me using you as a soundboard on issues related to gay and lesbian visibility in CSEA. I consider you a strong ally, even though you may consider me a pain in the a$$ ▯

Mary is stronger & a better Union leader thanks to you!

In Solidarity,

Yes, I will be in Niagara Falls this weekend along with 700 other CSEA members. Are you going to be there? Yes, I did get your message about waiting to submit the resolution. I'm sorry that there was no mention of the Martinez decision in the latest edition of The Workforce. There may have been a space issue for this edition so I'll mention it again to the Communications people.
Governor Paterson's directive applies only to employees of the State of New York. The Governor has no power to issue such a directive to local governments, municipals or school districts. According to articles in the local newspapers, there is a great deal of opposition to the directive in the NYS Senate and I believe that the Senate is considering legislation that would halt the implementation.
You might be able to get additional information at www.prideagenda.org. where my friend Prairie works. I may have mentioned her to you before. She was the coordinator for the Capital District Area Labor Federation for 7 years and recently accepted the position of Field Director at the Empire State Pride Agenda. Her email address is pwells@prideagenda.org. I had spoken to her previously about you and your Pride@Work chapter. I'm sure that she'd be more than happy to speak with you.
Please feel free to contact me at any time. I'm here for all of the members, Bess, not just some of them!

Mary E Sullivan
CSEA Executive Vice President

To this day there has been no article or any mention in The Workforce about the Martinez decision or any article about Pride at Work, including our recent three awards for the Labor Day Parade or the Community Solidarity Award Pride at Work received at the Rochester Labor Council Delegates dinner though there has been information available. This exchange was extremely frustrating for me as it highlighted many factors that I feel could be improved within CSEA. Critical information is often only sent to one or two individuals and it is up to them to ensure that the information trickles down to the unit level which rarely happens. The exchange about how to introduce resolutions seemed senselessly complicated and could easily be corrected by having more information available on-line with sample resolutions and the process outlined. In addition, VP Sullivan quickly and wrongly interpreted the Paterson directive concerning benefit ramifications of the Martinez decision as 'only' applying to State employees. The actual decision was very complicated and continues to be clarified today. I believe that her response was a way in not having to deal with the complications that come into play with gay and lesbian issues, which ultimately hurts 'some' of her members, though not all. VP Sullivan obviously did not think this issue needed research and legal advice. She guessed and gave misinformation about benefits that seriously affect gay families. It is worth noting that in the course of writing this paper I have received 3 calls or e-mails from

CSEA members with questions concerning domestic partner benefits or benefits resulting from same sex marriage. Two of these questions were referred to the Division of Human Rights as civil rights violations.

Furthermore, these exchanges illustrate that information is 'extracted' and not freely given. Obstacles appear to be placed in your path to frustrate your efforts to learn more about the processes. Almost all e-mails that I send to our local president go unanswered and if they are answered they are usually in person or over the phone so there is no written record to reference in the future. It is a major impediment to progress.

Things have begun to improve within CSEA, I believe the work that Pride at Work has been doing, as well as more members speaking out will eventually get CSEA to start including GLBT members. At the women's conference in Albany Mary Sullivan introduced me to several members that she thought I should know. In addition, the diversity workshop included gay and lesbian subject matter for the first time perhaps owing to my personal willingness to be visible. Just this past week I was invited to CSEA Region 5, Central Region Human Rights Committee to talk about what actions they can take to be more GLBT inclusive. I spoke an hour and ½ to about 12 members of this committee on the needs and issues of GLBT members. It was a wonderful opportunity. However, part of me is saddened by the fact that we were invited outside of our Region to be heard and have yet to be considered a resource locally. On the positive side we have been offered space for doing training on GLBT issues in May at the CSEA Satellite office in Rochester and I do anticipate that there will be CSEA participation. Plus I just found out that CSEA Unit 7400 purchased a table for the Pride at Work awards dinner. There are a few advocates within CSEA that understand and support Pride at Work.

Ideally, CSEA Inc. could show that they are inclusive by supporting a marriage resolution at the state convention. They could embrace self education that would focus on GLBT rights as workers rights rather than social justice issues. They could sponsor a bus to Albany for LGBT Equality and Justice Day, be organizational members of Pride at Work and encourage other CSEA members to join just as they do for CBTU. Most importantly they could show their support by encouraging visibility of gay members. CSEA need to use the words "Gay" or "Lesbian" in The Workforce or any publication

that CSEA puts out. And they need to celebrate the accomplishments of GLBT members equally. There are 290,000 CSEA members in New York State. My guess is that the majority of members have a son or daughter, brother or sister, niece or nephew or a friend who identifies as gay or lesbian. CSEA does a disservice to their members by remaining silent on this workplace issue. They do a disservice to their members and diminish the strength of the organization as a whole. Just as 'an injury to one is an injury to all', empowering each member empowers us all. Isn't that the problem?

Attachments:

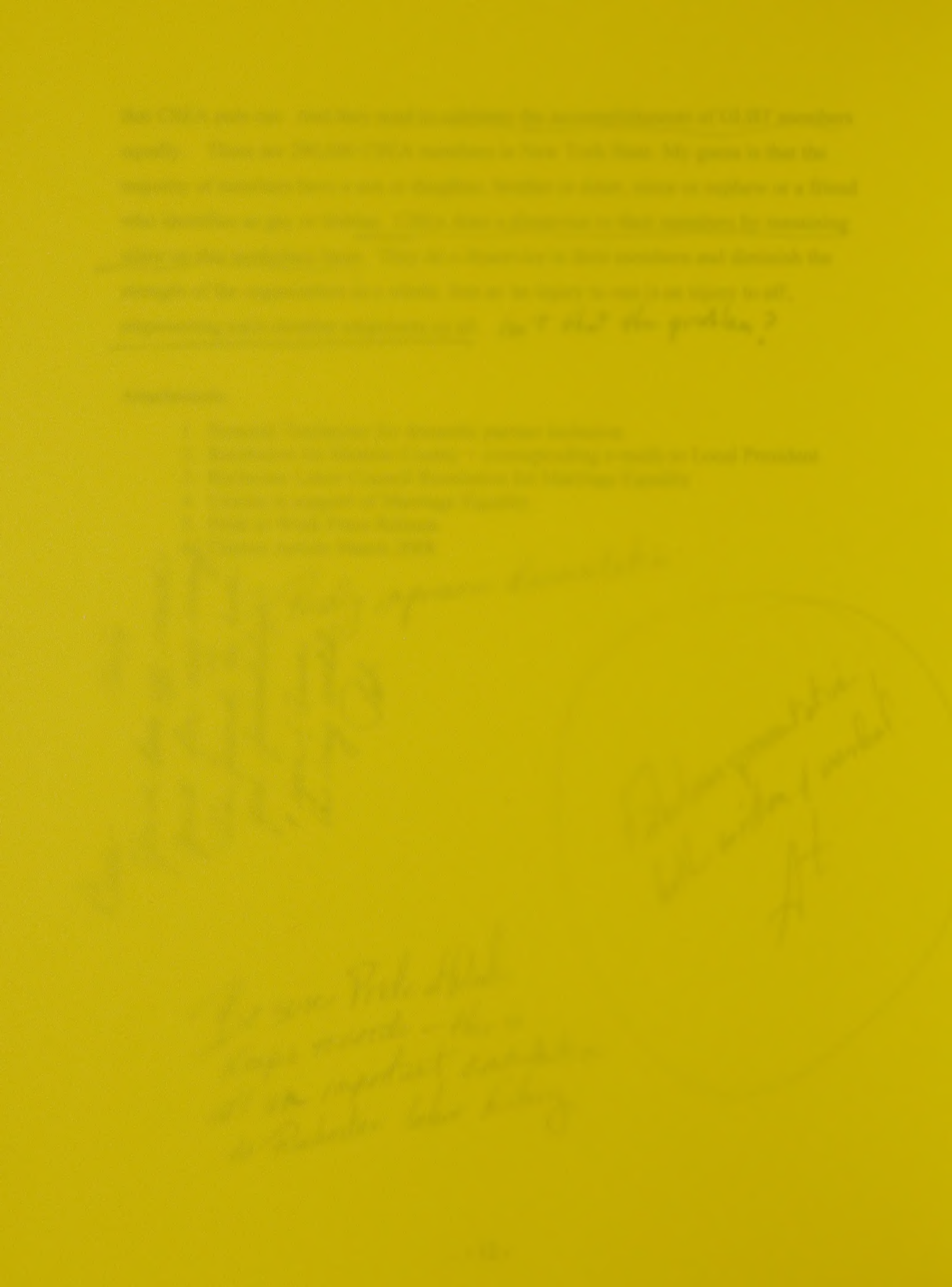
1. Personal Testimony for domestic partner inclusion
2. Resolution for Monroe County + corresponding e-mails to Local President
3. Rochester Labor Council Resolution for Marriage Equality
4. Unions in support of Marriage Equality
5. Pride at Work Press Release
6. Clarion Article March 2008

Really impressive documentation.

Bess -
You've done so much good for so many. I'm proud to have you friendship & love is my world.
5/2/9

Fabulous presentation both written & verbal.

Be sure Pride at Work keeps records - this is all an important contribution to Rochester labor history



PERSONAL TESTIMONY

My name is Bess Watts, and I have been employed at Monroe Community College (MCC) for about eight years. Previously, I have worked in libraries at Alfred University as well as in San Diego County in California. In all, I have about 20 years of library experience. Although I am well respected as an employee, in one important regard I am being treated as not equal to my co-workers, solely based on the fact that I am gay.

I have been gay all my life; it is as natural to me as left-handedness. I have never considered myself an activist and ordinarily would never "rock the boat" when it comes to contract negotiations, mostly due to the consequences personal exposure might bring here at MCC. About five years ago I attended a speech on diversity sponsored by MCC, in which sexual orientation was never mentioned. To this day I regret not speaking out to educate the speaker and the audience. The presentation also made me aware that MCC's definition of diversity did not include sexual orientation. In other words, it did not include me. Recent events in my life have made me realize, however, that if I don't speak out about the injustice that affects me and so many others, who will? Domestic Partnership Benefits should be added to the CSEA contract as a matter of equity.

This past year my partner of nine years, Anne, had major surgery. We are as committed as any married couple; we have power of attorney for each other; we bought a house together; we are financially interdependent; we are both active in our church; and we have two cats, Katie and Spencer-a very ordinary household. What was not ordinary was that I had to deplete my vacation bank in order to be by her side and literally nurse her back to health. My married co-workers would have been able to take sick leave under the same circumstances. In addition, Anne's mother fell ill and died. Again, I had to take vacation to be by Anne's side as her mother received last rites and to attend her funeral. My married co-workers would have been able to take bereavement leave under the same circumstances. My co-workers and directors have been supportive; however, they are limited in their ability to help due to the restrictive nature of the CSEA contract.

The CSEA contract states that employees are eligible for sick leave or bereavement leave only for a "relative who is an actual member" of the employee's household. In contrast, the MCC Faculty Association contract states "person living with" rather than "relative." Gay partners are thus covered for the Faculty Association but not for CSEA. Certainly if it is recognized as equitable for faculty to have such benefits, it would be a logical next step to extend the same benefits to the support staff.

In addition, Monroe Community College takes pride in the relationships it has fostered with the business community. Recently, Eastman Kodak was the recipient of the MCC Foundation "Salute to Excellence" award, and President Flynn has made it clear that he values MCC's relationship with Kodak. In contrast to MCC, however, Kodak has been the industrial leader in recognizing sexual orientation in the workplace for years, astoundingly having included sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policy since ***1986***. How can we as a college family promote business partnerships with The City of Rochester, Kodak, Xerox, Bausch and Lomb, and Heidelberg Digital without implementing the same fundamental business policies, such as domestic partnership benefits? How can we recruit and retain valuable personnel if there is a possibility that they will have to hide their orientation at MCC? The answer is simply that we can't.

All around us other Rochester educational institutions, such as RIT and the University of Rochester, as well as our peers at other SUNY and CUNY schools, have domestic partnership benefits. What kind of role model do we provide for gay students when staff are treated inequitably? What kind of message does it send to other faculty, staff, and students about the integrity of MCC's diversity program?

In 2003 sexual orientation was included in MCC's statement of non-discrimination in employment without a corresponding expansion of benefits. I leave you with this thought: Doesn't the failure to provide equitable benefits constitute overt discrimination? That is how it feels to me as an MCC employee.

Sincerely,

Bess Watts
Jan 2004

MONROE COUNTY EMPLOYEES UNIT
LOCAL #828
CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

James Volpone, President
167 Flanders St. (Off Thurston Rd.)
Rochester, New York 14619
Phone: 585-328-5250 • Fax: 328-3319 • E-mail: csea828@rochester.rr.com

Mr. Wayne Zyra, President
Monroe County Legislature
39 West Main Street
Rochester, New York 14619

Dear Mr. Zyra,

This letter is in support of the proposal made by the Social Action for Marriage Equality community coalition that the Monroe County Legislature provides access to Domestic Partner benefits to County employees, regardless of sexual orientation.

During past contract negotiations with the County, CSEA had submitted Domestic Partner benefits as a proposal, but the County rejected such.

There is a growing trend to provide these benefits to public and private sector employees. New York State CSEA Local 1000 has had domestic partner benefits since 1995. The City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, Kodak, Xerox, the Town of Brighton, and numerous other employees have these benefits. A list of jurisdictions represented by CSEA with Domestic Partner benefits is attached.

In their current contract, employees at Monroe Community College are provided Domestic Partner benefits. This means that some County employees have these benefits while others do not. It therefore becomes an issue of equity and fairness that all County employees are provided with these benefits. CSEA therefore supports this proposal..

Very truly yours,

Jim Volpone

Jim Volpone, President
Monroe County Employees Unit

January 7, 2007

President Wayne Zyra
Monroe County Legislature
39 West Main Street
Rochester NY 14614

Dear President Zyra:

We are writing as the Social Action for Marriage Equality coalition (S.A.M.E.), a group of Monroe County individuals and organizations who are working to achieve marriage equality for all New Yorkers, including ending the ban against marriage for loving same-sex couples here in New York. We request that the Monroe County Legislature protect the families of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people by establishing domestic partner benefits for Monroe County Employees and by passing a resolution which calls on Monroe County's state legislative delegation to support marriage equality for same-sex couples. Monroe County has a long history of fostering social justice and equity for all its citizens, so we are confident in your positive response to this "call to action".

The legislature should make full domestic partner benefits available for all Monroe County employees in order to provide benefit equity between couples who can legally marry and those who cannot or choose not to marry, regardless of sexual orientation. The City of Rochester, the State of New York and the County of Albany are among the many New York State government bodies that offer domestic partner benefits. The majority of Fortune 500 Companies also offer these benefits, as a cost-effective way to compete for talented employees. These entities view domestic partner benefits as a matter of providing equal pay for equal work.

We also ask the Legislature to use the power of its moral authority to end overt institutionalized discrimination against same-sex couples. We are asking the Legislature as a body to publicly support state legislation that guarantees marriage equality for same-sex couples. We request you submit a written resolution to the New York State Assembly, Senate and the Governor's Office for the passage of marriage equality legislation based on the equity of civil rights for all citizens of the state.

Gay and lesbian couples suffer serious consequences from discrimination. Denied the common legal, financial and social protections that civil marriage provides, same-sex couples find their basic family security needs in jeopardy. Recently a lesbian couple in Rochester suffered the consequences of the lack of legal protections for their relationship of 29 years. When Lee developed cancer, her partner Lori was not entitled to sick time or family leave to care for her and had to take unpaid time, depleting their savings. When Lee died, Lori was not entitled to bereavement time from her employer. As Lori was not entitled to Lee's pension or Social Security Survivor's benefits because they had not been able to marry legally, Lori had to move out of their home of many years. After working and saving together with Lee for 29 years, Lori now faces financial struggle for the rest of her life. There are 1500 protections and benefits given by government to other families through marriage. Same-sex couples like Lee and Lori need those securities also.

We can amply demonstrate how LGBT families are harmed by not having access to marriage, domestic partner benefits, or the other protections and responsibilities government makes available to all other families. We would be eager to speak with you personally and provide stories of families here in Monroe County affected by these issues. These are literally life and death matters, so there is a real urgency to our request. We will be contacting your office within the next few weeks to hear your thoughts about next steps in the process, including a timeline in which we can anticipate action on these two issues. Please also feel free to contact us in the meantime through our Coordinators Anne Tischer, Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church (585)426-0862 and Jon Greenbaum, Metro Justice metroj@frontiernet.net, with questions or feedback.

We thank you in advance for your concern for all the families of Monroe County, including those headed by same-sex couples.

Sincerely,

Social Action for Marriage Equality (S.A.M.E) members and supporters:

Metro Justice

Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church

Anne T. Tischer

Maria Monacelli

Donna Tyler

Karen M. Lasky

J. Michael Rogers

William J. Van Tassell

Amanda Robinson

Deborah A. Mohr

Albert B. Balt

Lee Camelio

Christopher M. Stewart

Paul L. Johnstone

Roza Eisenman

Ray Simons

Cynthia Allen

Lu Johnson

Susan Tyson

Eugene Ver

Jon Greenbaum

Rev. James F. Mulcahy

Bess Watts

Terry Keister

Sherri Munger

Terry L. Kelly

Vernon L. West

Susan Wasson

Patrick Fisher

Rebecca J. Gates

Jackie Akins

Rasheida Bennett

Linda Herman

Sandra J. Restieri

Renee Eberling

Juanita Saspey

Kerry J. Cater

Joan E. Tischer

Karen McCandlish

Jessica Akers

Watts, Bess (ETS: Library)

From: Watts, Bess (ETS: Library)
Sent: Monday, February 26, 2007 1:31 PM
To: Jim Valpone (unit7400@rochester.rr.com)
Cc: Flo Tripi (tripi@cseainc.org)
Subject: SAME coalition proposal for Domestic Partner benefts

Dear Jim,

Thanks for taking the time to speak with me by phone about the effort to get Domestic Partner benefits / health insurance for all Monroe County employees. Being new at political action, we have made some mistakes - notably by not getting with you sooner in the process. Because Unions have traditionally led the way with civil rights and equity issues, we made assumptions about your support without doing you the courtesy of face to face contact. We apologize. And we would have benefited from your insights. Obviously we've focused exclusively on the education of County Legislators without realizing there is a need for education of union members also...

You said that some members voiced opposition to domestic partner benefits. Diversity education concerning the issues faced by same-sex couples and families is available from organizations like Pride in Our Union who can provide education materials and speakers. We can set that up. People need to understand that this is a matter of equity and fairness in the workplace and not about personal values. New York State CSEA Local 1000 has had domestic partner benefits since 1995. The City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, Kodak, Xerox, the Town of Brighton , Monroe Community College, and hundreds more local institutions have domestic partner benefits. New York State law prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and similar legislation is expected to pass at the Federal level this year. Other equity legislation is being advanced in Albany. Equity is coming.

But Jim, there are real people who are in need of health insurance now for their families. ALL Monroe County employees, regardless of sexual orientation, need to have domestic partner benefits available to them, at least for health insurance. That is why we are asking you to help us. Can you please provide a letter from CSEA Local 828 that we can present to Wayne stating that your union supports Domestic Partner benefits for Monroe County employees? Then we can pressure the County to take the next step.

Sample:

" This letter is a declaration of intent to support the proposal made by the Social Action for Marriage Equality community coalition that the Monroe County Legislature provide access to Domestic Partner benefits to County employees, regardless of sexual orientation. As union representatives for the working families employed by Monroe County, we support the development of a memorandum of agreement to provide domestic partner benefits to all committed couples. We believe this to be a matter of equitable compensation as well as a validation of the equal worth of all employees. If Monroe County is willing to address implementation of a Domestic Partner benefit policy, we will enthusiastically offer a draft memorandum for their consideration. "

We would like to present this letter as soon as possible to Mr Zyra and friends and get a response from them before the next legislature meeting in March. I would be happy to pick it up or you could mail it to me at 3 Rossmore Street, Rochester NY 14606. John Vasco of the Federation of Social Workers has said he will send a letter and the Deputies Unions are being approached. We have a sample Memorandum of Agreement that was used elsewhere to get Domestic Partner health insurance benefits which I will send you a copy of and some local statistics. We really need your help to make this happen and appreciate your feedback...

Thanks again,

Bess Watts
3 Rossmore St
Rochester NY 14606
(585) 426-0862
(585) 292-2318
besswhat@gmail.com – home
bwatts@monroecc.edu - work

Carl Sandburg was once asked what he thought was the ugliest word in the English language. He thought for a minute and

Watts, Bess (ETS: Library)

From: Watts, Bess (ETS: Library)
Sent: Monday, February 26, 2007 3:00 PM
To: Jim Valpone (unit7400@rochester.rr.com)
Cc: Flo Tripi (tripi@cseainc.org)
Subject: Legislature letter to Zyra 1-7-07
Attachments: Legislature letter to Zyra 1-7-07.doc

Here is the original proposal to President Zyra that was referred to in the previous e-mail. We continue to collect signatures supporting these initiatives. The one thing about being involved in the political process is that you forget who you have and have not given information too. Anne and I will bring you everything you need to know on Wednesday so you can get up to speed on our process. Obviously we are not lobbyists or experts in Union negotiations, so we hope you will forgive our clumsiness; what we do have is passion in social justice matters.

We know that we are approaching this from an unorthodox way, but it is our hope that if the county legislature and County Executive Maggie Brooks is on board than the county administration will follow.

Again, I am sorry for the confusion.

Sincerely,

Bess

Passed RLC Exec on 5/1/06

Resolution for Marriage Equality

While members of labor unions have a variety of views about marriage, according to their personal or religious beliefs, it is a fundamental, uniting principle of the labor movement that all people are entitled to equal rights.

Many union members have participated over the years—both as union members and in their communities—in movements for equal rights for women, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, seniors and others—even when those equal rights were controversial at the time and opponents of working people were trying to use them as wedge issues to divide our strength. Similarly, union members and the labor movement have a long history of supporting equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers.

As unions, we have a particular responsibility to protect equal rights and promote economic justice in connection with collective bargaining, economic benefits and legislation that affect our members. The labor movement invented domestic partner benefits to respond to the real economic needs of unmarried union families, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members.

We recognize that the lack of access to civil marriage deprives gay and lesbian working families of more than 1,500 rights and benefits afforded heterosexual families, such as spousal Social Security and pension benefits, hospital visitation rights, spousal health insurance, immigration rights and many other federal, state and local protections, as well as rights in the workplace. We know that this denial of marriage equality hurts not just these families but all the family members, neighbors and co-workers who care about the well-being of these couples and their children.

Civil union and domestic partnership laws, while well-intentioned, create an unequal legal status for same-sex couples which extends state and local-level protections and benefits afforded "spouses" in heterosexual marriage, while denying them the more than 1,000 federal benefits of marriage.

Therefore, be it resolved: We affirm the labor movement's commitment to equal rights for all union members, including our LGBT members.

We will support the right of same-sex couples to access all the rights, responsibilities and legal commitment of civil marriage and oppose laws and constitutional amendments that deny those rights.

We will resist any attempt by anti-worker forces to use this issue in elections this year or beyond to divide working people in order to elect candidates with proven track records of favoring corporate special interests at the expense of working families.

Our labor federation will make it a legislative goal to ensure that all members enjoy equal rights and benefits and will determine where New York State elected officials stand on this issue prior to the 2006 elections.

We will propose that the New York State AFL-CIO adopt this resolution.

PRESS RELEASE
Unions Representing 850,000 New Yorkers Urge Assembly to Pass Marriage Equality Bill

New York, May 17, 2007—NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan Lubin sent a cover letter and packet of information to all New York State Assemblymembers, which included a list of labor unions and federations from across the state who support marriage equality for same-sex couples in New York. On the list are unions, labor federations and union leaders whose combined membership represents more than 850,000 New Yorkers. This is also the first time that New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), SEIU Local 32BJ and Retail, Wholesale, Department Stores Union/United Food and Commercial Workers (RWDSU/UFCW) have publicly announced their support for the marriage equality bill.

"As unions, we have a particular responsibility to protect equal rights and promote economic justice in connection with collective bargaining, economic benefits, and legislation that affects our members," Alan Lubin writes in his letter. "I am urging you to continue to do the right thing and co-sponsor and vote yes on the Marriage Equality bill...As you make your decision, I want you to consider my full and unwavering support for this bill. I stand in solidarity with the supportive union leaders, local unions, and area labor federations on the attached list."

"RWDSU is committed to continue the struggle for human rights including the right to marry for same-sex couples in New York," said RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum.

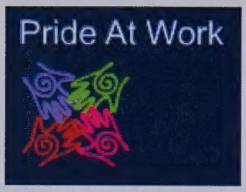
In addition to the unions and labor federations listed above, the following have also passed resolutions in support of marriage equality: 1199 Service Employees International Union (SEIU) United Healthcare Workers East; United Federation of Teachers (UFT); United Auto Workers (UAW) Region 9A New York Metro Community Action Program (CAP) Council; Capital District Area Labor Federation; Rochester & Genesee Valley Labor Federation; and the Central New York Area Labor Federation (federations are multi-union organizations within specific geographic regions of the state).

Alan Van Capelle, Executive Director of Empire State Pride Agenda, New York's statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization said about the union support, "Today many of New York's most influential labor leaders and the hundreds of thousands of members that they represent stand united with same-sex couples and their families in calling for the New York State Assembly to pass the marriage bill now. Organized labor has always been at the forefront of advancing economic and social justice and they're doing it again through their solidarity with our community on marriage equality."

Other influential labor leaders who have publicly stated their support for marriage equality in the past include: Dennis Rivera, Past President of 1199 SEIU Healthcare Workers East; Randi Weingarten, President of UFT; and Bruce Raynor, President of UNITE HERE.

* * * *

Founded in 1990, the Empire State Pride Agenda is New York's statewide civil rights organization committed to achieving full equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) New Yorkers and our families. The Pride Agenda fights for these objectives by: educating the public, elected officials and policymakers; building coalitions and mobilizing allies; and, organizing and empowering the LGBT community. With thousands of supporters, the Pride Agenda has offices in NYC and Albany and is the largest statewide LGBT organization in the country.



Press release:

Local activists battle workplace discrimination

Rochester, N.Y. (Nov. 5, 2007) As of the first week of November, the House of Representatives is slated to vote on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which extends workplace protections to lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Also pending is an amendment to add protections for workers based on gender identity.

Likewise concerned for the welfare of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) workers on the job, local activists in the Rochester area formally met at the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley (GAGV) to initiate the Rochester-Finger Lakes Chapter of **Pride at Work** , a constituency group of the American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). The purpose of **Pride at Work** is to mobilize mutual support between the organized labor movement and the LGBT community to achieve social and economic justice.

Bess Watts, a civil service worker at Monroe Community College library and a member of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), is President of the local group and sees

great need for this organization in the Monroe County area: "Despite the full inclusion of LGBT employees by our biggest local companies like Kodak, Xerox, Bausch & Lomb and Corning, smaller institutions are often oblivious to the concerns of their LGBT workers. Even County of Monroe employees find themselves without access to Domestic Partner benefits that would make health insurance available to their families."

Watts sees full equality for LGBT workers in their workplaces and unions as inevitable; "It's a win-win situation for both employers and employees when an environment of inclusion exists, attracting and retaining talent in an organization by assuring that each employee feels recognized valued and treated equally".

Tom Privitere, longtime political and labor activist agrees. "We will work towards creating a labor movement that cherishes diversity, encourages openness, and ensures safety & dignity," he says. "Our goal is to educate the LGBT community about the benefits of union membership for LGBT working people, and to build support and solidarity for the union movement in the LGBT community."

Membership is open to all regardless of union affiliation or non-union status. Those seeking more information about **Pride at Work** can contact Bess Watts at besswhat@gmail.com or log on to http://www.prideatwork.org . The next meeting will take place at 167 Flanders Street (off of Thurston), December 6 at 5:30 pm.

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CSEA member wins on marriage equality

Monroe CC must give benefits to lesbian spouse

By CANDICE JOHNSON

On February 1, a State appeals court ordered Monroe Community College in Rochester to recognize the marriage of college employee Patricia Martinez and her spouse, Lisa Ann Golden. The ruling held that same-sex marriages performed out of state must be officially recognized in New York.

"My spouse and I are thrilled beyond words with the decision," said Martinez, who brought the suit against the college. "This is a historic, precedent-setting ruling that will change the landscape of marriage in New York State. It will also change the way everyone looks at marriage." The court's decision applies to all employers in New York, both public and private.

Martinez, a member of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), said members of her local have been extremely supportive. "The reaction from my co-workers and colleagues has been nothing less than amazing," she told *Clarion*. "For the past two weeks, since the release of the ruling, staff and faculty alike have stopped by my office, called, or e-mailed me with congratulatory messages," she said. "While some may not understand the magnitude of the decision, they simply believe it's the right thing for same-sex couples. What an amazing environment I work in!"

Equal recognition for LGBT workers

HISTORIC

In July 2004 Martinez and Golden were married in Canada, where same-sex marriages are recognized under the law. Within a week, the newlywed Martinez applied to get health care benefits for Golden from her employer, Monroe Community College (MCC), where she is a word-processing supervisor. Five months later, the then-head of the college's human resources department denied her application, on the grounds that New York State law does not recognize same-sex marriage.

The lawsuit, filed in 2006, was initially dismissed. But the appellate court found in Martinez and Golden's favor, citing New York's long-standing "marriage recognition rule." For the past century, courts have repeatedly found if a marriage is legally valid where it was performed, it must be recognized in New York State.

The county has said it will appeal the decision to New York's highest court. "I'm looking forward to our day in court and getting this issue settled statewide once and for all," Martinez said.

The CSEA local at MCC was not involved in the lawsuit but negotiated to add domestic partner benefits to its contract after the case was filed. MCC's Faculty Association, which is affiliated with New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), has had domestic partner benefits in its contract since 2004. (PSC members have had domestic partner benefits since the 1990s.)

VALIDATION

"This decision was a good one and certainly is a step in the right direction for marriage equality in New York State," said Bethany Gizzi, the Faculty Association's grievance chair. The ruling "will ensure that all MCC employees now have the right to have their marriages recognized," Gizzi told *Clarion*. The effort to win full marriage equality at both State and federal levels is important, she said, because "domestic partner benefits do not provide the vast array of rights and benefits that marriage does."

The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) labor group, Pride at Work, also expressed its support. "The Martinez decision has implications for every same-sex household in New York," said Bess Watts, president of the Rochester Pride at Work chapter. "It means workplace equity in terms of health insurance for spouses and children, family and bereavement leave, and survivor benefits. But the subtler, equally significant impact of recognizing same-sex marriages is the validation of gay and lesbian employees as full and equal members in the workplace."

"It is a shame that the Monroe County administration has such a myopic, provincial perspective that they would appeal this historic decision," added Watts. On February 25, more than 200 people rallied in downtown Rochester to protest the decision to appeal.

Valentine actions for paid family leave

CUNY faculty and staff sent CUNY management a lot of cards this Valentine's Day. The cards support the PSC's bargaining position for paid time off to care for new or ill family members, saying, "CUNY, stop breaking our hearts! Give us time with our families!"

Union activists and their children have gathered more than four thousand postcards from members and students.

Pat Arnow

At Queens College, young activists organize Professor Hester Eisenstein's support.

Dave Sanders

Brooklyn College students, staff and faculty asked CUNY to have a heart.

Gary Schoichet

"Wouldn't paid family leave be sweet?" asked Bronx Community College activists.

Dave Sanders

When PSC Executive Committee member Nancy Romer asked Brooklyn Collge students for their support, they lined up to fill out cards.

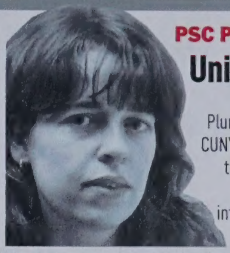
Pat Arnow

Queens College political science faculty Keena Lipsitz (and Rica) and Julie George (and Amelia) explain the total lack of paid family leave for CUNY faculty and staff to a student.

Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

MARCH 2008



PSC PEOPLE

Union U.

Amanda Plumb runs a CUNY program that draws students into unions. PAGE 8

Dave Sanders

LOW SALARIES HURT CUNY

The PSC asked its members to describe the impact of CUNY's low salaries, and the stories streamed in. Members told of personal hardships – and the damage done to CUNY as an institution by years of uncompetitive pay. Low salaries cause problems in retaining CUNY faculty, wrote Paula Gannon of Hostos (above), which exacts a cost in student retention and graduation rates. She summed it up this way: "If you want to keep CUNY students, keep CUNY faculty." PAGES 10-11

BUDGET

PSC asks Albany for more funds

PSC activists headed to Albany to tell State lawmakers this is the year to do right by New Yorkers and make a serious down payment on CUNY's future. PAGES 3 & 12

FAMILY LEAVE

Valentine's Day cards ask action

Union members at 13 campuses asked colleagues and students to send a Valentine's Day card to CUNY management – to support paid family leave. PAGE 5

INJURY TO ALL

Adjunct health care is broken

When adjuncts are ill they lose coverage and income at the same time. It's morally wrong and a problem not only for adjuncts, members tell *Clarion*. PAGES 6-7

WELFARE FUND

Long-term care plan, Part 2

The Welfare Fund's new long-term care policy is opening to those insured under the previous plan. The new plan has more flexible options. PAGE 9